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Summary: The Shadow left its mark. No question about that. It got him. And something inside Will broke, that day. Will still trembles in terror at the flashbacks... but sometimes, something gets all twisted in his head. Sometimes, so late at night that no one else in the world could possibly be awake, Will thinks about Mike. He knows it's wrong. But then again, what about him isn't broken?

Torch

The Shadow left its mark. No question about that.

It got him. It *took* him. And something inside Will broke, that day.

Will still trembles in terror at the flashbacks... but sometimes, something gets all twisted in his head, and he finds himself slowly, shamefully reaching under the blankets as the memories drive through his skull. The burning-cold, blasting force of the smoke-tendrils, pushing not only down his throat and into his eyes and nose and ears, but *everywhere.* Every orifice. The cold numbing him down to the bone, wrapping around him like a vice, stinging his skin, surrounding him, *filling* him. He was choking. He remembers that. Choking, and trying to scream, but he was breathing so fast, lungs jackhammering in his chest, that he could only manage rapid, sporadic little shrieks. His eyes were wide open - wide, *wide* open, almost comically wide - but all he could see was the shifting, writhing, driving *black* as it bore into his eye sockets, burned up his nose and into his sinuses, shoved down his throat and pushed up *into him.* And it's not *that* that he thinks about as he touches himself, of *course* not - but. But sometimes, so late at night that no one else in the world could possibly be awake, Will thinks about Mike.

Mike was there. He was there when Will surfaced with a gasp. He was standing there that whole time - and he was there while everything else happened, too. From the field where they burned the tunnels to the hospital to the shed - Mike was there. Kind, enthusiastic, earnest, *gorgeous* Mike, with his fluffy-dark hair and his eyes as deep and dark as the night sky and his artfully curved cheekbones.

Will knows he shouldn't. He knows it's wrong and weird and probably just one more item on the laundry list of ways that he's irreparably broken. But sometimes, all those images get tangled up in his brain. *That day,* and Mike, and cold and heat and cords tied around his wrists and *rage* and - *let me go! Let me go! Let me go, let me go, let me go let me go let me go -*

The first time it happens it's because he's desperate for sleep. The past

few weeks have been bad, and it's supposed to be the best time of the year but he can't seem to shake the shadow that seems to cling to him with sharp, intangible claws, and Mike kissed El at the Snow Ball and Will hates it, he hates *everything* right now, and he just wants - he just needs - he just wants to sleep. That's all. He hasn't slept in what feels like weeks. So he resorts to this. To pulling one arm under the blankets, untying the front of his pajama pants, wriggling his fingers under the waistband. And he honestly didn't mean to, but - well, like he said, it's been a bad few weeks. Those images, those memories are all stewing in his head, putting so much pressure on the inside of his skull that he's afraid it'll split and burst like a chestnut in the fire. And somehow, *somehow,* in his sleep-deprived, bleary, tangled-up state, everything gets all mixed up and backwards and spliced together, and all at once his brain is carrying him along through a fantasy that he never consciously planned.

He imagines that he's in the shed again. Tied to the chair again. And Mike is there - but only Mike. No one else. And this time Mike puts his hands on Will's face, his cheeks, and says, *You're freezing... We need to get you warmed up.* And Will knows this is just a fantasy, because if it was real, the Shadow would have snarled, *No.* But instead, in his imagination, Will nods fervently, unable to speak, unable to break through that crushing control enough to stir his vocal cords to action. And Mike yanks down the zipper on the front of his navy blue hoodie, peeling it from his arms, draping it haphazardly over Will's shoulders. Baring his own arms, which pebble with gooseflesh. Looking down at Will with those soft, dark eyes, all sincerity as he says, *There. Is that better?* And Will nods again, in his fantasy and in real life, unsure where his brain is taking him in this narrative but unable to resist the pull as imaginary-Mike inches closer, braces his arms around Will's neck, climbs rather ungracefully into his lap. Straddling him. Caging him in with his gangly, *warm* limbs. He whispers against Will's hair. *Better?*

It's the warmth that does it. Will's mind has merely to *suggest* that Mike would be warm - warm, in the midst of all that mind-numbing, crushing, burning *cold* - and all at once Mike is a torch. A bonfire. A being of pure flame, melting Will's very essence with the heat radiating from him, scorching him with every touch. And Will *pushes* up into it, into the burning touch, his real body arching against

nothing but blankets as, in his mind, he bows up against the body of his best friend. The Shadow in him shrieking, recoiling from the heat, and Will chasing his destruction with fervor. The details blur and mesh, logic abandoned in favor of speed, and all at once the hospital gown has vanished and - and Mike's clothes, too, he decides with a nervous lick of his lips. Mike would be - he would be pale, under his clothes. Will knows that. He's seen that - at least, the top half. They've seen each other shirtless before a few times. Will knows that Mike's skin is pale, with a sprinkling of freckles in the summer. He imagines - he cringes in shame for a moment, turning his face into the pillow, but only for a moment - he imagines that Mike would be hard. Under the blankets, Will's fist flicks steadily over his own straining flesh. Impatient, he lifts his hips and shoves the pajama pants down his thighs, summoning up as much spit as he can to slather his palm with before continuing.

Mike would be naked, and hard as Will, and his skin would be fire. He'd smooth scalding palms up Will's chest and down the backs of his shoulders. He'd press his white-hot torso to Will's, searing away the numbing cold-burn of the Shadow. His tongue would be an ember, his mouth molten lava. A phoenix, perched in Will's lap, his lips hot and wet where they'd bury themselves against Will's. He'd rock - *oh* - he'd rock against Will, grinding their bare flesh together rhythmically, and Will's hand slows to emulate it.

It's all downhill from there. Everything runs together like a watercolor in the rain, and Will is awash in the phantom feelings and images of *hands tied* and *fire* and *Mike* and *control* -

And it's not enough. When the Shadow took him it was everywhere - *everywhere,* not just on his skin but *inside* too.

Fueled by the half-drunken state of sleeplessness and lust, Will does something he's never done before. He rolls onto his side. Sticks a forefinger in his mouth and coats it in saliva, sucking until it's slick-dripping with the stuff. Reaches down. Hesitates. And then his brain hits him with another rush of supercharged blood as the memories get all knotted together with the fantasy - *fire, Mike, choking, pushing, tongues, skin, dark eyes, spreading, Shadow, pulsing, burning,* burning -

Will whimpers into his pillow as he first starts to rub, investigating

this unbreached boundary.

Mike would do this, his brain suggests, unbidden, and Will shudders and grinds unconsciously down against the mattress. *Mike would untie you and help you up off that chair and hold you against a wall and -*

It hurt when the Mind Flayer took him. It hurt so much, and he couldn't even scream properly - but Mike - Mike wouldn't hurt him. Much. Just a little. Just enough to make it *good.* And Will eases one fingertip in, cautiously, gasping and jolting against the mattress, pushing a little farther. Mike would - oh, God - Mike would do this. He'd push one finger up inside Will, like *this* - o-*oh* - and slide it out and push again, oh *fuck* -

Will's heart bangs against his ribs, fluttering at a million miles an hour. He's sweating under the mass of blankets, his neck damp with it, strands of hair sticking to the nape of his neck. Warm. Warm, like Mike would be, kissing him and softly pumping one finger up into him, speeding - *hah* - speeding up a little and, and - and biting Will's lower lip, hard enough that it hurts, hard enough that Will starts to whimper and then squirm at the delicious little jolt of pain. In real life, he's biting his own lip, teeth clamped down on it until the sensitive flesh throbs with his heartbeat, hot blood pulsing under his incisors. If he bit just a little harder he'd draw blood. For a moment, he's tempted.

Mike would nuzzle his face against Will's hair as he touched him, whispering to him, encouraging him. Things he'd never, ever say in real life. *It's okay. It's okay. I like it, too. C'mon, Will. C'mon, I can tell you like it.*

He doesn't mean to, but he releases a weak little moan into the pillow, mindlessly humping the bed and imagining that it's Mike, stroking one finger into himself and *wishing* it was Mike, wishing that he wasn't really just alone in this bed, wishing that -

Crazy together, right?

Mike would -

Except he wouldn't.

Coming down from his release, still twitching every few seconds, Will curls onto his side and pants, trying to catch his breath. Mike wouldn't. Ever. That kind of stuff... That's what everyone says about Will, and people like him. And Mike isn't like him. Mike is good.

But that doesn't stop Will's brain for tormenting - treating? - him with images of Mike's eyes, his face, his hands and hair and body, all mish-mashed up with restraints and hospital gowns and Shadows and fire. It happens far more frequently than he would ever admit - even to himself.

He knows it's wrong. But then again, what about him *isn't* broken?